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THE CHURCH AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

Introduction

At the call of the Lutheran World Federation Department of World Missions a group of about forty theologians, pastors, mission specialists, and one Rabbi, the Rev. Arthur Gilbert of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, met at Løgumkloster, Denmark, April 26-May 2, 1964. These men were called for a consultation around the theme, "The Church and the Jewish People."

The first days of the consultation were devoted to Bible Studies, Lectures, and discussions on the Lectures presented. The total membership was then divided into five committees with the responsibility for drawing up statements of the findings of the consultation. The findings of the first four committees were carefully analyzed, sent back for revision, and restudied, and finally approved by the whole group. Because Committee five was not able to complete its statement, it is not included in the statement of findings.

The following is approved statement of the findings of the Consultation:

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CONSULTATION FINDINGS

I. The Church and Israel

The Church may use the term Israel theologically only in the sense in which it appears in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments: in the first instance, as an expression of God's sovereign grace toward Abraham and his descendants, the people of the old covenant, to whom God revealed His will and promised His redemption for the blessing of the nations; in the second place, as an expression for the people of the new covenant made up of Jews and Gentiles in which, through the redemption in Jesus Christ, the Gentiles become fellow heirs of the promises. Here we take up both the New Testament assertions about the true seed of Abraham and the typological interpretations of Old Testament history as applied to the Church.

Thus the Church testifies that, by the fulfillment of the promises in Jesus the Messiah and by His acceptance by but a part of the Jews, a division has arisen which has placed the "old" Israel outside the "new." This division will be healed when "all Israel" (Romans 11:26) recognizes Jesus of Nazareth as its Messiah. Only then will the mystery of the faithfulness of God toward His people be resolved. These who share in the inheritance must recognize a grateful responsibility for the original heirs. It follows, therefore, that the Church will pray for the Jews daily, especially in its Sunday worship.

Those who in faith through baptism have put on Christ Jesus are all Christians, without distinction, whether they have their origin in the people of the old covenant or among the Gentiles. Terms such as "Hebrew Christians," and the like, introduce unbiblical divisions into the Church.

The gathering of Jews in the land of the patriarchs may in God's redemptive purpose have special importance. We live much too close to this development, however, to make a specific judgment about its religious significance: God's action in history we are unable to discern.

II. Mission and Dialogue

A. The Church is called by her Lord to be His body in the world, and to proclaim the mighty works of God to all men (Acts 2:11). Following the call of her Lord, the Church has the responsibility of beseeching all men on behalf of Christ to be reconciled to God (II Corinthians 5:20).

Because of this responsibility,

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the Church also has the obligation to carry on organized mission activities through which the message of reconciliation is brought to men.

As a member of the Body of Christ, every Christian also shares in the "sentness" of the Church. This quality of "being sent" applies in every area of the Christian's relationship to the world, and he will witness with his whole life, in testifying to his faith (I Peter 3:15), in listening to others, in seeking to understand, and in sharing the burdens of his fellow man.

B. The witness to the Jewish people is inherent in the content of the Gospel, and from the commission received from Christ, the Head of the Church.

The mission will most effectively reflect the glory of Christ in His Gospel when it is pursued in the normal activity of the Christian congregation, which reflects itself in the Christian witness of the individual members.

Where Jewish communities in the world cannot normally be reached by Christian congregations, mission organizations must provide for the proclamation of the Gospel to these people.

C. It is a Christian responsibility to seek respectfully to understand both the Jewish people and their faith.

Therefore responsible conversations between Christians and Jews are to be desired and welcomed.

Such conversations presuppose the existence of common ground on which Christians and Jews may meet, as well as points of difference.

The conversations may be carried on through organized institutes, or by individuals and groups.

The conversations do not assume an equating of the religions, nor do they require that Christians abstain from making their witness as a natural outgrowth of the discussions. Similarly Christians will listen gladly as Jews explain their insights of faith.

III. The Church and Antisemitism

Antisemitism is an estrangement of man from his fellowmen. As such it stems from human prejudice and is a denial of the dignity and equality of men. But antisemitism is primarily a denial of the image of God in the Jew; it represents a demonic form of rebellion against the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and a rejection of Jesus the Jew, directed upon His people. "Christian antisemitism is spiritual suicide."

This phenomenon presents a unique question to the Christian Church, especially in light of the long terrible history of Christian culpability for antisemitism. No Christian can exempt himself from involvement in this guilt. As Lutherans, we confess our own peculiar guilt, and we lament with shame the responsibility which our Church and her people bear for this sin. We can only ask God's pardon and that of the Jewish people.

There is no ultimate defeat of antisemitism short of a return to the living God in the power of his grace and through the forgiveness of Jesus Christ our Lord. At the same time, we must pledge ourselves to work in concert with others at practical measures for overcoming manifestations of this evil within and without the Church and for reconciling Christians with Jews.

Toward this end, we urge the Lutheran World Federation and its member Churches:

1. To examine their publications for possible antisemitic references, and to remove and oppose false generalizations about Jews. Especially reprehensible are the notions that Jews, rather than all mankind, are responsible for the death of Jesus the Christ, and that God has for this reason rejected His covenant people. Such examination and reformation must also be directed to pastoral practice and preaching references. This is our simple duty under the commandment common to Jews and Christians: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."

2. To oppose and work to prevent all national and international manifestations of antisemitism, and in all our work acknowledge our great debt of gratitude to those Jewish people who have been instruments of the Holy Spirit in giving us the Old and New Testaments and in bringing into the world Jesus Christ our Lord.

3. To call upon our congregations and people to know and to love their Jewish neighbors as themselves; to fight against discrimination or persecution of Jews in their communities; to develop mutual understanding; and to make common cause with the Jewish people in matters of spiritual and social concern, especially in fostering human rights.

IV. The Life of the Lutheran Church in Israel

A. Church Organization and Related Questions.

In the light of the reports put before us concerning the situa-

tion among Lutherans in Israel and their need for pastoral care as well as for support in view of the legal situation (e. g. the lack of recognition of Lutheranism as a legal entity possessing "personal rights" in religious affairs), and in view of their responsibility for Christian witness and service in Israel, it is recommended:

1. *To, the sending Churches and sponsoring bodies* of the Lutheran groups presently in Israel, that they encourage the latter to confer with one another concerning their common responsibilities, and to discuss the question of establishing an indigenous united Lutheran Church in Israel;

2. *To these groups in Israel*, (a) that they invite all Lutheran bodies in Israel to participate in these discussions, (b) that they bear in mind also the responsibility of working with other Protestant groups in Israel toward strengthening their common witness;

3. *To the Lutheran World Federation,* that it hold itself in readiness to send a representative, if requested, to participate in such discussions among the Lutheran groups.

B. Ecumenical Study Center.

It is recommended that the Lutheran World Federation endorse and seek participation in the plans being made under the auspices of the World Council of Churches for the establishment of an ecumenical study center at Jerusalem in relation to the Swedish Theological Institute, it being noted that it is envisioned that there will be an opportunity to contribute both Lutheran personnel and financial support (professors' salaries, scholarships and fellowships, etc.) to the project.

C. In view of the large number of Lutherans to be found among tourists, students and other visitors in Israel (e. g. volunteer workers in the kibbutzim), as well as diplomatic personnel, it is recommended that steps be taken to arrange the establishment of a Lutheran "tourist chaplaincy" in Israel. Such a chaplain should have a command of English, German, and a Scandinavian language, and also be expected to learn Hebrew. We ask that this recommendation be forwarded to the LWF Executive Committee.

D. It is recommended that the Department of World Service of the Lutheran World Federation, in consultation with the Lutheran groups working in Israel, be asked (1) to investigate whether one or more Christian service projects under Lutheran spon-

sorship would be appropriate and welcome in Israel; (2) to communicate its findings to the LWF member Churches.

E. The consultation would like to report that the needs and difficulties of the Christians in Israel, especially those of Jewish origin, have been discussed, and it wishes to express its solidarity with them.

V. Continuation of the Work of this Consultation

It was resolved:

1. That the LWF Commission on World Mission be requested to take steps for the formation of a representative body that would assume continuing responsibility for dealing with the concerns of this consultation, including the following: (a) The Theology of the Relation of Christianity to Judaism; (b) Questions of mission, dialogue and service; (c) Questions of inter-group relations.

2. That the Commission on World Mission be requested to charge the body to be formed to deal specifically with the uncompleted theological work of this consultation.

Quaet - gift - A.W

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